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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 10/17/08

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- (1) Premier considering holding Lower House election on Nov. 30:  
Seeking chance of winning, touting economy as his selling point

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Excerpts)  
October 17, 2008

Prime Minister Aso has started looking into a scenario of dissolving the Lower House by early November and holding a general election on November 30, based on the view that in order to steer his administration, it would be indispensable to gain popular support, by winning a victory in the next Lower House election with the catchphrase "Aso for the economy." However, now that the financial crisis is having a serious impact on the real economy, it is not easy to determine the right timing.

LDP ready to go

LDP Election Committee Chairman Makoto Koga at a party of LDP Lower House members on October 16 said, "Dissolution of the Lower House and a snap election have come within range. The prime minister is good at skeet shooting. He is now about to pull the trigger." He thus corrected his statement made on the 9th that it is not possible for the LDP to contest the next election with the current economic climate.

Secretary General Hiroyuki Hosoda also said at another party of Lower House members: "We are looking into compiling a package of economic stimulus measures that will lead to a second supplementary budget and then seeking the judgment of the people. A chance for dissolving the Lower House for a snap election will come soon."

When he took office, Aso was toying with the idea of dissolving the Lower House in early October at the outset of the extraordinary Diet session and holding an election in early November. However, the New York Stock Exchange registered the biggest loss in history on the

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day Aso made that statement. As a result, he had to order the early start of Diet deliberations on the supplementary budget bill.

The prime minister has shifted his focus from "political crisis rather than policy" to "economic stimulus package rather than dissolution of the Lower House." However, the situation does not allow him to devote himself to economic stimulus measures. Former Secretary General Nobutaka Machimura at a meeting of senior members of his faction revealed an outlook that the election would be held on November 30. One senior member of the faction asked one of the members of the leadership, "We want you to let junior members start moving with a November 30 election as a premise."

Those who want to see an early dissolution think that the prime minister should dissolve the Lower House while his administration is still enjoying high support ratings right after the launching. Many junior members are calling for putting off a Lower House dissolution. They eagerly want the prime minister to decide to put off the dissolution, because their reserve funds for the election will not last long. In any case, both want the prime minister to make a decision quickly.

The New Komeito now wants to have a Lower House election on November 30, instead of early November as insisted previously. Its members are becoming impatient with one noting, "It is unforgivable not to hold an election, after making us use money and manpower to this extent." There is also an observation that the New Komeito had applied pressure on the prime minister and the LDP on the strength of its cooperation in the upcoming Lower House election.

Narrowing options

The DPJ's "smile strategy" of cooperating for the handling of bills to pave the way for an early Lower House dissolution will end at the end of the month. If it becomes certain that there will be no dissolution, then the DPJ is bound to switch to a resistance policy. There is a significant risk of the prime minister finding himself held up because of the divided Diet, where the DPJ controls the Upper House.

Another scenario is that if a Lower House election slips to December, it is bound to affect the year-end compilation of the budget, hurting Aso's catchphrase "Aso for the economy." It is difficult to allow political vacuum to occur from January through

March next year, a period for Diet deliberations on the fiscal 2009 budget. As such, while a timeframe in which the Lower House can be dissolved is narrowing rapidly, a time until the current term for lower house members ends in September next year would come. The prime minister appears to be inclining to hold an election next month.

(2) Editorial: Diet debate on refueling bill should be carried out from broad perspective for Afghanistan

ASAHI (Page 3) (Full)  
October 17, 2008

The Diet will start today deliberations on whether Japan should allow the Maritime Self-Defense Force to continue its refueling operation in the Indian Ocean with an eye on what Japan can or should do for an international effort to fight against terrorism.

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It was exactly seven years ago when attacks on Afghanistan began in October 2001 soon after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. The battle ended in just one month and the government of President Hamid Karzai was inaugurated in that country. However, the development of that country has been far from the international community's expectation.

The whereabouts of Osama bin Laden, leader of the al-Qaeda terrorist organization, has yet to be uncovered. As the Taliban has renewed vitality, foreign forces taking part in the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan (ISAF) have been on the defense. It is said that the Karzai administration has control of less than 30 PERCENT of the entire country. Civilian and military casualties have rapidly increased. Even Japanese nationals were casualties.

A pessimistic view that the Taliban will uncontrollably gain power if nothing is done is spreading now in the U.S. government.

There are probably many reasons for such developments. For example, security in Afghanistan has deteriorated because the U.S. military was forced to cut down its strength there due to the Iraq war. Money from poppy growing and drug smuggling became funding sources for the resurgence of the Taliban. Other reasons include the collusive nature of the Karzai government, many Afghan civilian casualties by U.S. air strikes, and the loss of popular support.

The Bush administration has called on countries concerned for additional dispatch of troops, shifting to a policy of reinforcing its military strength. However, many countries have been reluctant to do so. There are countries that have decided not to dispatch more troops for the reason that in order to improve security in Afghanistan, there is no other choice but to strengthen the Afghan military. The notion being floated is to ask countries that will not send more troops and countries that have not dispatched troops to boost their shares of the war expenditures.

A British military commander in Afghanistan said: "We cannot defeat the Taliban by military power" ultimately. This may be a conclusion that the international community has finally arrived at after seven years.

Therefore, what the international community should do is to conclude a peace agreement with a moderate Taliban group through dialogue so that the al-Qaeda terrorist group will be isolated. President Karzai, who initially opposed a dialogue with al-Qaeda, and the U.S. government have finally focused on the possibility of dialogue.

At the same time, it is important to send the dividends of peace to Afghan people by boosting reconstruction assistance. It is also necessary to have more Pashans join the Afghan government. The Pashans are the main force of the Taliban. This will eventually lead to the stabilization of the political situation in Pakistan, a neighboring country of Afghanistan.

The present international effort to support Afghanistan, including political, civilian and military assistance, should be reconsidered.

It may be difficult to launch a full-fledged study before the inauguration of a new U.S. government. Until the new U.S. government is launched, such moves as cross-border attacks against Pakistan that would complicate the situation should be refrained.

It is meaningful for Japan to discuss now in the Diet as to how it

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should contribute to international efforts to reconstruct Afghanistan and eradicate international terrorism. The Diet should carry out a debate not only on the government-drafted bill aimed to continue Japan's refueling operation but also on the Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) counterproposals from a broad perspective.

(3) Gap between Japan and U.S. over nuclear and abduction issues

SANKEI (Page 13) (Abridged)  
October 17, 2008

By Fuji Kamiya, professor emeritus, Keio University

Weak-kneed Six-Party members

The United States has now removed North Korea from its list of state sponsors of terrorism. What is most puzzling about this matter is that North Korea is referred to as a "terrorism-sponsoring" nation. I find this expression odd.

As was admitted by the North Korean dictator himself, the North abducted Japanese nationals for many years. Abduction is unmistakably an act of terrorism. North Korea should be called a terrorist nation instead of a terrorism-sponsoring nation. In my view, a weak-kneed response to the North by the Six-Party members, including the United States, lies behind this expression.

It is not about a matter of rhetoric. The United States designated North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism in 1988. At that point, Japanese abductees were not officially recognized by the Japanese government.

The Six-Party Talks began in 2003. Over the next five years, the denuclearization of North Korea has dominated the talks, and the abduction issue has rarely been discussed in plenary sessions.

U.S. likely to opt for an agreement by making compromises

The first term of the administration of President George W. Bush was rather good in that it upheld a severe policy regarding the North Korean nuclear issue. The administration, for instance, resolutely demanded the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of the North Korea nuclear programs.

A shift to conciliatory policy occurred in the second term of the Bush administration, when Condoleezza Rice became secretary of state after the departure of Donald Rumsfeld as secretary of defense.

The U.S. used to demand that the North must totally eliminate its nuclear programs. The policy has been reduced to preventing nuclear weapons from spreading to such rogue states as Iran and Syria and international terrorism groups like Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

Softening up its nuclear policy to that extent, it seems only natural for the United States to find it difficult to line up with Japan's hard-line approach on the abduction issue. Even so, it is improper to justify Japan and blame the United States alone for a rift between two countries over the North Korean nuclear issue.

Senior U.S. officials have reiterated that they would not leave the abduction issue behind, while Japanese officials have repeatedly indicated that Japan has not lost its leverage with the delisting.

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Although those words are easy on the ears, they all lack specifics

about what constitutes a settlement of the abduction issue.

In Japan's public opinion, a settlement constitutes bringing all abductees back to Japan and the complete clarification of complex and odd circumstances surrounding the abductions. Japan is not in a mood to find a settlement line somewhere between two opposing assertions. In the end, we might have to settle on the "current situation plus something extra," which is a far cry from the mood of Japan's public opinion.

Meanwhile, the United States thinks there is no other option but to make compromises in talks to reach an agreement. The question is how to bridge the gap between Japan and the United States.

Independent ability to set off the North to take action

Work to find a settlement line is likely cause a fissure between those who benefit from it and those who do not. Additionally, it might cause not only serious mental stress in society but also bring instability to Japan-U.S. relations. This tough issue could be postponed, but we must be prepared to tackle it sooner or later.

Over the last some 60 years since the end of World War II, Japan has endeavored to increase its economic power and international position based on its alliance with the United States.

All in all, this policy course has brought about substantial results. But for that, Japan has had to pay a huge price, namely its own international political right not to depend on other countries.

Regarding Japan's hard-line approach on the abduction issue, Tokyo cannot expect much from the United States in the future. Frankly speaking, the other members of the Six Party Talks are gazing at Tokyo with even colder eyes (than the United States). Will an isolated Japan be able to be strong enough to independently nudge the North to take action?

There is no doubt that Japan has a powerful weapon called a solid ability to extend economic assistance. The question is if Japan's political will is strong enough to seek a total resolution of the abduction issue without attaching any conditions? A tug-of-war is about to begin between Japan's public opinion and international reality.

(4) Aso's favorite phrase is "for some reason or other": Is he trying to conceal his embarrassment or give evasive answers?

ASAHI (Page 4) (Full)  
October 16, 2008

Prime Minister Aso, whose distinctive personality is that he uses rough language, has several favorite phrases. While he tries to be explicit, by frequently using such words as "properly (kichinto)" and "basically (kihon teki ni)," to keep up conversations, he noticeably uses the phrase "for some reason or other (nantonaku)." He uses this phrase when answering to reporters in impromptu interviews. It sounds as if he uses that word to give evasive answers so that he can avoid committing himself.

It has been about three weeks since Aso took office as prime

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minister. The number of times he uses the phrase "for some reason or other" during impromptu interviews at the Kantei, which takes place every day and during replies at Lower and Upper House Budget Committee meetings tops 50 a day. He also frequently uses words like "what shall I say (nanteino)" and "kind of (nanka)." The number of times he uses such words has totaled over 80.

For instance, he kept using the phrase "for some reason or other" during telephone conversations with two Japanese Nobel laureates in physics on October 7. During the conversation with Professor Toshihide Masukawa at Kyoto Sangyo University, he said, "'What shall I say,' 'this sort of thing,' 'what shall I say,' the elementary particles theory or something like that..." and "For some reason or other, for some reason or other, we should have 'kind of' dreams. We

should not think studying or physics is difficult for 'some reason or other'."

He made a similar remark in conversation with Makoto Kobayashi, professor emeritus, at the High Energy Accelerator Research Organization: "I often hear young people have no dreams for 'some reason or other'. Since persons who have worked hard and done steady research received the Nobel Prize, I feel you the results of your steady efforts or efforts have borne fruit 'for some reason or other.'"

He used the phrase "for some reason or other" 11 times in just two two-minute conversations with them.

In impromptu interviews, he often tries to dictate conversation, by raising questions or giving replies in the middle of questions. Even so, he tends to use the phrase "for some reason or other."

He spoke his mind the day after he took office as prime minister: "I felt anew that I have many people around me 'for some reason or other.' I strongly felt the importance of my responsibility." He complained about a question-and-answer session with DPJ Chairman Ozawa during a plenary session of the Lower House, "We argued on different planes 'for some reason or other.'"

In connection with global warming, Aso said when he released a list of cabinet ministers on September 24 right after his assumption of office, "A sea change is clearly occurring around us for some reason or other." It is unclear whether he meant that it is clear that a sea change is occurring or he meant that a sea change is occurring for some reason or other.

The Kojien dictionary defines "nantonaku" as "for no specific reason." The word is incongruous for the prime minister, who has a reputation as a straight-talker. His frequent use of the word can be taken as intended to cover his embarrassment.

An old acquaintance of Aso said: "Nantonaku had long been his favorite phrase. I told him that since he is a politician, he should say things clearly. He should stop using that phrase. However, he is continuing to use it."

(5) Maher: Environmental protection factored into Futenma relocation plan

RYUKYU SHIMPO (Page 2) (Full)  
October 17, 2008

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In his regular press conference yesterday, U.S. Consul General for Okinawa Kevin Maher was asked about what impact the motion adopted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) calling for the protection of dugongs would have on the agreed-on plan to relocate the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station to a coastal area of Camp Schwab. He answered:

"Environmental protection, including dugongs, has been factored into the (relocation) plan. To confirm it, the Japanese government is undertaking procedures for an environmental impact assessment. There will be no impact on the plan's timetable."

Maher explained that the construction work that has already started on the site at Camp Schwab is related to the relocation of Futenma Air Station. He expressed his view that there is no contradiction in simultaneously carrying out the environmental impact assessment and construction work. He added: "The Japanese government will decide whether an underwater environmental impact assessment is necessary or not."

Two working-level teams are tasked with discussing measures to remove the danger and deal with other problems related to Futenma Air Station. They held their first meetings in Okinawa on Oct. 15. Maher indicated a certain level of understanding about the teams, saying: "The government's working team and the prefecture's one are making efforts. I welcome the teams' activities since they will

contribute to deepening the mutual understanding between the central and prefectural governments."

Maher, however, repeated his conventional view about the prefectural taskforce's demand that the construction site for the relocated base be moved further into the sea, saying: "I expect the plan will be implemented in accordance with the agreement."

Asked for his view about Nago City's request to study the noise levels of helicopters, Maher just replied: "I do not know whether such is necessary, but if requested, we will study the possibility."

#### (6) TOP HEADLINES

**Asahi:**

Senior Vice Minister Kurata allegedly asked for short-term visas for Filipino women who worked at bars in Japan

**Mainichi:**

Nikkei down 11.41 PERCENT , recording second largest drop

**Yomiuri:**

Japanese, South Korean firms to jointly own iron mine in Brazil as countermeasure to soaring resource prices

**Nikkei:**

Japan mulling temporary freeze on corporate accounting rules in addressing global financial crisis, following U.S., Europe

**Sankei:**

Two Chinese submarines detected in East China Sea early October, suspected of trailing U.S. aircraft carrier

**Tokyo Shimbun:**

Lower House election on Nov. 30 becoming more likely

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**Akahata:**

Pensioners hold rallies across nation, calling for abolishing elderly health plan

#### (7) EDITORIALS

**Asahi:**

- (1) Discuss Japan's contributions to Afghanistan in deliberations on bill to extend refueling mission
- (2) Politics-and-money scandals: Stop dependence on companies

**Mainichi:**

- (1) Extra budget bill enacted: Prime minister should decide on early Diet dissolution
- (2) Scandal-tainted DPJ member Maeda naturally should not run in Lower House election

**Yomiuri:**

- (1) It's time to increase social security spending
- (2) BOJ urged to take every possible step to contain global financial crisis

**Nikkei:**

- (1) Give priority to effectiveness over quantity in mapping out extra economic measures
- (2) DPJ should fully investigate Maeda scandal

**Sankei:**

- (1) With passage of extra budget bill, full policy debate needed between ruling, opposition camps
- (2) Don't stop NHK reform, with reduction in viewing fees

**Tokyo Shimbun:**

- (1) Don't miss opportunity to seek public confidence
- (2) Two U.S. presidential candidates expected to engage in debate that will lead to erasing public fears

Akahata:

(1) Thoroughly probe the cause of incidents of pesticide-contaminated Chinese green beans

(8) Prime Minister's schedule, October 16

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
October 17, 2008

07:27

Arrived at the Kantei.

09:00

Upper House Budget Committee meeting.

11:30

Met with Upper House member Ichiro Tsukada

12:36

Met with Chief Cabinet Secretary Kawamura at the Kantei

13:02

Upper House Budget Committee meeting.

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15:05

Met with Vice Foreign Minister Yabunaka at the Kantei. Then met with U.S. Senator Hagel and Ambassador to Japan Schieffer.

16:01

Met with Supreme Court Judge Shimada. Then met with Lower House member Keisuke Suzuki and Cabinet Intelligence Director Mitani.

17:31

Upper House plenary session.

17:45

Met with State Minister for Economic and Fiscal Policy Yosano.

18:16

Government and ruling parties meeting to discuss a new package of economic stimulus measures, then met with Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Uruma.

19:43

Dined with Finance Minister Nakagawa, State Minister for Administrative Reform Amari and Deputy LDP Election Committee Chairman Suga at a Chinese restaurant in ANA Intercontinental Hotel Tokyo.

21:43

Went to Baron Okura, a bar in Hotel Okura, with secretaries.

22:44

Arrived at the private residence in Kamiyama-cho.

SCHIEFFER